

City of Corunna  
Special Council Meeting  
Monday, April 9, 2001

Present: Billis, Bayless, Dumond, Hornus, Mehigh, Ockerman, Runyan.

Absent: None.

Guests: Joe Sawyer, City Manager; Janet Washburn; Don Washburn; Gary Schooley; Clark Long; Diane & Keith Johnson; Millie Taute; Judy Horton; Bill & Linda Lawson; Frank Svrcek; Jan Scott; and other concerned citizens.

The meeting was called to order in the City Council Chambers by Mayor Billis at 6:30 p.m.

AGENDA APPROVAL: Hornus moved, Dumond seconded to approve the agenda as presented.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Ockerman, Dumond, Hornus, Runyan, Bayless, Mehigh.

No: None.

Motion CARRIED

CALL TO AUDIENCE: Gary Schooley, 301 Ferry Street, stated during the National Collegiate Athletic Association finals his daughter-in-law took his grandkids to the roller rink in the park. They came back about 15 minutes later and told him they were told they could not skate there because they were not members of a hockey club. He further stated he jumped in his truck and went down to the park but no one was there. Councilperson Hornus stated this was not the way the roller rink was suppose to be set up. Councilperson Ockerman asked Mr. Schooley why he did not contact the city manager first. Mr. Schooley advised he did, but he wanted to make others aware of the situation. Councilperson Ockerman informed Mr. Schooley that the situation should be brought to council if he does not get good service from the city manager because that is his job. Councilperson Bayless stated he appreciated the information Mr. Schooley brought to council.

CITY MANAGER'S CONTRACT: Councilperson Ockerman stated he talked to Mr. Sawyer and asked him if he wanted to go through his contract. Councilperson Hornus asked if this would be done during open session. Mr. Sawyer advised yes. He further advised the point that Councilperson Hornus raised at the last meeting was a valid one because there was no clear position given as to what the full benefits were, and he did not take offense to the question because it was a reasonable request that needed clarification. Mr. Sawyer also advised he did not know an intent was given when the motion was made, but it is important that everyone is clear on what the intent of the motion was for the benefits. Mr. Sawyer stated there are differences between the salary positions and the administrative contracts within the city. He provided council with a list of the differences and proceeded to review the differences. Councilperson Ockerman stated he would answer questions council had concerning his motion. Councilperson Bayless asked Councilperson Ockerman what his understanding was when he made the motion concerning Mr. Sawyer's salary and full benefits. Councilperson Bayless stated it was his understanding the benefits would be sick days, health insurance, etc. The car allowance was approved for only one individual so he

could not consider that to be a standard benefit. Councilperson Bayless asked Councilperson Ockerman what his thinking on that issue was. Councilperson Ockerman advised he did not know the contract included a car allowance. The intent of his motion was to have the benefits the same as the last city manager had, and he did not think that was misunderstood, but if it was, then he apologized. He further advised he set the salary at \$45,000 because the police chief makes \$43,000. The temporary salary Mr. Sawyer was given was \$42,000 so the salary difference was \$3,000 not \$5,000. Councilperson Ockerman also advised the reason he set the salary at \$45,000 was because the chief administrator should not be making less than any other employee. Councilperson Ockerman stated he would have answered that question last week if someone had asked it.

Councilperson Hornus stated he did not vote in favor of the contract. Councilperson Ockerman stated he understood that but council had the opportunity to ask questions that night. Councilperson Hornus stated council has to remember that Mr. Sawyer is the new kid on the block and he has not proven anything yet. Councilperson Hornus further stated he wanted to go through the original contract that Ms. Hitchcock had and explain some of the items that he could not go along with in Mr. Sawyer's contract. Councilperson Ockerman stated the vote has been taken and there would not be a revote. Councilperson Bayless stated council does not have a signed contract yet. Councilperson Ockerman stated the contract presentation was just a courtesy thing. The motion was made, discussion took place, and a vote was taken. Councilperson Bayless stated from his point of view council was caught flat-footed at that meeting because the item was not originally on the agenda. A lot of questions came up after the fact because the situation came up unexpectedly. Councilperson Ockerman stated it was not illegal to add things to the agenda. He further stated he gave eight reasons why council needed to address the situation at the meeting that he thought were valid and evidently four other council people thought they were valid too. Mayor Billis stated council needed to discuss Mr. Sawyer's benefits. Councilperson Hornus stated Mr. Sawyer's contract was the same contract that Ms. Hitchcock had. A lot of the benefits in her contract accrued over a period of seven years and when she started her salary was \$35,000. Councilperson Hornus further stated some of the fringe benefits were granted in lieu of salary, and he was not going to go along with some of them. The first item he did not agree with was listed under termination, which states that Mr. Sawyer would be given three months severance pay at the current rate of pay. The second item was life insurance, which states that Mr. Sawyer would receive a \$100,000 policy. The city treasurer is a new employee and he has a \$50,000 policy, which is plenty for a new employee. Councilperson Hornus also questioned the 96 hours of sick pay per fiscal year. Councilperson Runyan asked when the auto allowance was given to Ms. Hitchcock as a trade off for salary. Councilperson Hornus advised two or three years ago. He further advised Ms. Hitchcock received an increase but it was not shown under salary. Longevity is where this came in. Councilperson Runyan asked if Ms. Hitchcock received a raise the year she received a car allowance. Councilperson Ockerman stated he thought she received a raise every year. Councilperson Hornus stated yes, but not as much as she expected. Councilperson Ockerman stated Ms. Hitchcock received at least a five percent increase each year. Councilperson Mehig stated he interpreted Councilperson Ockerman's motion to mean that Mr. Sawyer would receive the same full benefits that Ms. Hitchcock received. Councilperson Hornus advised council did not have Mr. Sawyer's contract at that meeting. Councilperson Ockerman stated that was right, but he did not know the car allowance was included, but since it is, it is. Councilperson Bayless stated council was arguing a mute

point because nothing could be changed. There are two different interpretations of what the benefit package was going to be when the motion was made because his interpretation was different than what Councilperson Ockerman explained to council tonight. Councilperson Bayless further stated he was a little shocked at what went on because it was his understanding that the item was only going to be discussed and it ended up being a motion item. He also stated there is no need to continue discussing the item since there was nothing further that could be done. He asked if there was anything that could be done to clarify or adjust the contract. Councilperson Hornus stated the entire thing was done wrong. Council should have had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Sawyer. Mayor Billis pounded his gavel and advised Councilperson Hornus that he was out of order. Councilperson Bayless stated he did not believe Councilperson Hornus was out of order because he had the floor and was recognized. Councilperson Hornus advised he stated at the last meeting that he wanted to negotiate some of the fringe benefits with Mr. Sawyer before a contract was signed. He further advised he made it very clear at the last meeting that if the contract was signed then council was locked into it. Councilperson Runyan stated if council felt the contract was going to be changed then this should have been done before going out for applications. Mayor Billis stated not necessarily. Councilperson Hornus stated it is negotiable. Mayor Billis referred back to Councilperson Bayless' point and stated if four council people did not understand Councilperson Ockerman's motion then probably a new vote was needed. Councilperson Ockerman stated he would not rescind his motion. Councilperson Hornus stated every employee has full benefits, but not a \$40 car allowance or severance pay, which are considered fringe benefits. He further stated he would like to negotiate a contract with Mr. Sawyer. Councilperson Ockerman advised the vote was still four to two. Councilperson Dumond stated council was negotiating for a city manager, and therefore, council was looking at an employment agreement for a city manager. Councilperson Ockerman stated the only reason he wanted this meeting was so council could get along. He further stated it was his intent to try and make Mr. Sawyer's job easier. Councilperson Ockerman also stated he would like council to accept the fact that the majority has voted and council needs to try and work with Mr. Sawyer and move on because this is gaining nothing. Councilperson Hornus asked if council could talk to Mr. Sawyer. Mayor Billis advised yes. Councilperson Hornus asked if this should be done in closed session. Mayor Billis advised Councilperson Hornus to proceed. Councilperson Hornus asked Mr. Sawyer how his business was going. Mr. Sawyer advised well. Councilperson Hornus asked Mr. Sawyer if anybody had ever sued him. Mr. Sawyer advised all the time. Councilperson Runyan stated he did not believe this was something that should be done in a public meeting. Mayor Billis stated he had a little problem himself with someone trying to destroy Mr. Sawyer publicly. Councilperson Hornus stated Mr. Sawyer is going to run the city. Mayor Billis interrupted Councilperson Hornus by pounding his gavel. Councilperson Hornus advised he asked the mayor if the discussion should be held in closed session. Mayor Billis stated it appeared that Councilperson Hornus had a problem with Mr. Sawyer. Councilperson Hornus stated he had no problem with Mr. Sawyer. Mayor Billis stated then treat Mr. Sawyer with respect. Councilperson Hornus stated he does. Mayor Billis asked Councilperson Hornus why he was trying to destroy Mr. Sawyer publicly. Councilperson Hornus stated the mayor needed to remember that Mr. Sawyer is going to run the city. Mayor Billis stated yes he is.

APPOINTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR: Mehigh moved, Runyan

seconded to appoint Janet Washburn as Parks and Recreation Director. Councilperson Bayless stated it was his understanding that council could ask questions in a closed session before any motions were made so council could review the applications. Councilperson Ockerman concurred. Councilperson Runyan withdrew his second. Motion died for lack of support. Councilperson Ockerman asked if a closed session would be held separately for both applicants. Councilperson Bayless advised both applicants are entitled to the same privacy from each other. Mr. Sawyer advised he was not sure that council could bring the applicants into a closed session. The applications could be reviewed in a closed session but the interviews could not be held in a closed session. Councilperson Bayless suggested getting input from the applicants during an open session then go into closed session to discuss the applications. Councilperson Ockerman stated he had a serious problem with that. There could be questions asked that should be done in a closed session instead of an open session. He further stated if the applicants request a closed session then that is the way council should go. Mayor Billis asked Ms. Washburn if she had any objections with discussing everything in an open session. Ms. Washburn advised she did not have a problem with an open session. Councilperson Dumond stated he did not know Mr. Lawson and would like to hear what he has to say. Mr. Lawson advised he also had no problem with an open session. Councilperson Runyan read the Open Meetings Act. Councilperson Dumond asked if council could hear from each applicant and then go into closed session. Mayor Billis advised yes. Janet Washburn stated she was on the city council, understands budgets as well as needs and wants, and was a member of the charter commission that wrote the city's charter. She further stated she hopes that everyone can rise above their political bent and look at a person's abilities and quality of work. She also stated council has to look at what would be good for the community and what could be brought to the city. Ms. Washburn advised she recognizes that the job is a three-day a week job, but she felt that was probably not enough time. She also understood there are five meetings a month that the director should attend, but only as a silent observer. She further advised she has been a member of all of the commissions, and they are all well oiled. She also advised if there are problems going on within the commissions then the parks and recreation director needs to bring ideas to them, but she does not believe the parks and recreation director should step in and start changing things that are already going well. Councilperson Hornus asked Ms. Washburn how her hip was doing. Ms. Washburn advised great, but it was not her hip; it was her leg. Councilperson Hornus stated he asked that question because he knew Ms. Washburn has had some problems with it and there could be a lot of walking involved. Councilperson Hornus asked Ms. Washburn if she was computer literate. Ms. Washburn advised no, but she has a computer and is on America Online and that is about the best she could tell him right now. Councilperson Hornus stated there is a lot of computer work involved. Ms. Washburn advised she understood that and has signed up for some computer classes. Mayor Billis advised council to keep the questions geared toward what is to be shared with the community. Ms. Washburn stated it was her understanding that the city is seeking someone to take over the little league program, and she feels the person who is hired to do that job should be allowed to run that program. Councilperson Hornus stated the Corunna Schools dumped the little league program on the city a few years back. Ms. Washburn advised Councilperson Hornus she was going to tell him exactly what happened and stated the Corunna Schools did not dump the program on the city. The former parks and recreation director wanted the softball commission, which she was a member of at that time, to consider taking on the program and that is how that program got started in the City of

Corunna. Councilperson Hornus stated all he knew was that the Corunna Schools quit running the summer program. Ms. Washburn advised no, she believed that Mr. Schooley wanted the city to run the program and was directing the program for the softball commission. She further advised she would continue the park concerts. Councilperson Ockerman asked how the city was going to fund the concerts. Ms. Washburn advised it was a mental thing between council and the parks and recreation director. The city should develop a program, find out what the costs are and advertise the concerts in the paper. She further advised Emerson School has an enrichment program and it is great. Councilperson Runyan stated he did not want to be meddlesome and asked Ms. Washburn if she felt the commissions have intelligent people on them. Ms. Washburn advised yes. She further advised the council has done a wonderful job of allowing the commissions do their own thing. The Halloween party is a wonderful example, but council cannot take credit for that. Councilperson Ockerman asked why not. Ms. Washburn advised because it is the grunts that make it work. She further advised there is an Easter egg hunt this weekend and council supports it, but that is what the volunteers are all about. The volunteers are the highest esteem people in the community and the least recognized, but that is her own personal opinion. She also advised it is essential for the city to take care of its property. The facilities are in need of repair. Ms. Washburn stated when she left the city, the parks and recreation commission knew how much it would cost to repair the grandstand, but she does not know what happened because obviously nothing got done. Councilperson Ockerman stated the city had a few streets and sewer system to take care of. Ms. Washburn advised she understood that but a lot of the work on the grandstand was going to be done on a work program. She further advised the community center is something the city council is going to have to look at and determine what they want to do with it. She also advised her vision is to make some changes to the entrance on the east side of the building in order to make it handicapped accessible. She suggested purchasing a chair lift or installing an elevator, which probably scares the council, but the Methodist church put one in for approximately \$24,000. She further stated if council wants to generate some real money from the community center then something needs to be done with it. Mayor Billis asked Ms. Washburn to explain the loop between handicapped restrooms and generating money. Ms. Washburn advised she did not believe the community center could be rented out without being handicapped accessible or maybe once the city starts doing something with the building then the state or building inspector might require the city to make the building handicapped accessible. Mayor Billis asked Ms. Washburn if she had anything specific on how to generate more revenue. Ms. Washburn advised people are looking for places to rent. The church in the village generates enough money so the city does not have to support it. Mayor Billis asked what kind of events she envisions to hold in the community center. Ms. Washburn advised people are looking for places to hold things, and the city has something to offer the community. She further advised when she was on the council the city received a price on a chair lift in the amount of \$1,200 or \$1,500. Councilperson Hornus advised the cost was \$8,000 or \$9,000. Ms. Washburn stated she believed there are grants available for the park. She further stated she does not have a grant writing background, but she would be willing to take a grant-writing program. She also stated she was disciplined, would be around for long-term, was enthusiastic, would bring integrity to the job, and hoped that council would consider her. Bill Lawson stated he did not really know Ms. Washburn but she seems like a wonderful person. He further stated he knew her son. He also stated he was caught a little off guard and advised council that Ms. Washburn had discussed a lot of

the information that was in his application. Mr. Lawson advised he went into the military service several years ago and studied data processing so he was very computer literate and a quick study. He further advised he has not been on all of the committees that Ms. Washburn has been on, but he feels he might be an asset because he would bring a fresh approach to the city. He also advised he would not be the kind of guy that would tell a commission that they had to wait to do something. He would be a liaison between the commissions and the city if the commissions had a question. Mr. Lawson stated he was not opposed to giving the commissions some input and would try to be very fair. He further stated he prides himself in bringing people together. He does not gossip because that is not his style. He also stated he had a small antique business, which took him out on the road for a few years. He traveled all over and booth rent was a minimum of \$300 for four days plus table rent. Mr. Lawson advised he is a businessperson who sees needs and tries to find solutions. He further advised his wife is a volunteer who does the Halloween Party and he helps her. He also advised he sells antiques on the Internet. Mr. Lawson stated he has been a tennis player for many years and has turned tennis into a business by giving lessons. He further stated he has the time to be the parks and recreation director. He anticipates being needed a lot at first because it would be a big transition period and would be willing to put in over 40 hours if needed. He also stated there is a crying need for building repairs, and the little drinking faucet should be fixed. Mr. Lawson advised the grandstand does not have rafters underneath it so it would be a lot of work for the volunteers to do. He further advised it could be possible to sell grandstand seats and engrave names on them to help fund the repairs. He also advised he would like to see the community center get more use. Mr. Lawson reported the city had three concerts last summer that did very well. He suggested tying in a concert when the trailer rally is in the park. Trailer rallies are a good source of income. He further suggested making up welcome packets to give to the members of the trailer rally to show them the city wants them here. Mayor Billis stated that has been discussed for quite some time. Mr. Lawson advised he would be willing to contact the businesses downtown. He further advised the roller rink area is a young people's playing place that will attract people the city wants to have in the park. He understands there are issues involving who has control over the roller rink, and he would be happy to help people come to a meeting of the minds. Mayor Billis stated he it was his understanding that there are issues regarding who controls the roller rink. Mr. Lawson stated the roller rink ultimately belongs to the city because the rink is on city property, but the city cannot cut out the person who is running the hockey program. The inside of the rink is interesting, but the outside looks like plywood stick out of the ground. Mr. Lawson further stated he knows a little bit about the Master Gardener program and they need projects so the people can fulfill their certification. He would be willing to try to find a nursery that would be willing to donate material and give them credit. He also stated Wickes Lumber might be willing to supply material if there was a sign erected that would recognize them. Mr. Lawson advised when he was a kid and wanted to play little league there were try-outs and he did not make it. The following year Nick Annese came to town and every kid made the team and played at least two innings. Mr. Lawson further advised he does not believe in try-outs or cuts and would like to have input on who is hired for the summer baseball/softball program. He also advised he knows there have been are conflicts. He has had some problems with parents in tennis, but he talks out the conflicts. Mr. Lawson stated he would be willing to attend the existing commission meetings to offer ideas, support and encouragement. He further stated he has a pickup truck that he would be willing to use to pick up items that are needed. Ms. Washburn stated she

was down to the playscape during its construction. There was a flood so she got her flashlight out of her car and went down to take a look. By the time she was finished, she felt used and abused after she finished collecting all of the materials that was needed. Councilperson Ockerman asked Ms. Washburn if she was currently employed. Ms. Washburn advised she was retired. Councilperson Ockerman asked how long she was retired. Ms. Washburn advised two years ago in June. Councilperson Ockerman asked Ms. Washburn if she had a vehicle. Ms. Washburn advised yes. Councilperson Ockerman proposed not to go into closed session. Councilperson Bayless stated he has gotten several phone calls on this issue, and he was really uncomfortable about bringing up some of the things he has heard in a public session. He further stated he does not want to embarrass anybody, but he wants council to consider the input that he had privately. Mayor Billis advised he appreciated the way Councilperson Bayless stated his concern, but under the rules of a closed meeting those reasons would not fly. Councilperson Bayless advised the things he has heard related to items in the application. Mayor Billis stated if the discussion relates to items in the application then it would be okay. Councilperson Bayless asked if the applications would be discussed amongst council without the applicants. Mayor Billis advised yes. Councilperson Bayless stated he wanted to discuss both individuals privately amongst council and the discussion should be very brief. Councilperson Ockerman asked if it was legal to do that. Councilperson Bayless stated if he is out of line then council should let him know and he would forget it. Bayless moved, Hornus seconded to leave the special meeting and go into closed session.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Hornus, Mehigh, Dumond, Bayless, Ockerman, Runyan.

No: None.

Motion CARRIED Time was 8:09 p.m.

Runyan moved, Bayless seconded to leave the closed session and return to the special meeting.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Mehigh, Bayless, Runyan, Dumond, Hornus, Ockerman.

No: None.

Motion CARRIED Time was 8:36 p.m.

Mehigh moved, Dumond seconded to hire Janet Washburn as Parks and Recreation Director. Councilperson Bayless stated he was concerned with Ms. Washburn's computer skills and advised her that there are a lot of contracts on the computer. He further stated he realizes she is taking a computer class and asked if she could foresee any problems about being able to handle that responsibility. Ms. Washburn advised not at all. Councilperson Bayless asked Ms. Washburn what her level of computer training was. Ms. Washburn advised she could turn on a computer and get into America Online, but admitted she was not very good at using a computer and does not have computer skills. She further advised she lives next door to Baker College, and they have guaranteed her a tutor. She also advised she has an electric typewriter and would rather use that instead of a computer. Councilperson Bayless stated it appeared Ms. Washburn's keyboarding skills were good and that was a good start.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Dumond, Ockerman, Mehigh, Runyan.

No: Hornus, Bayless.  
Motion CARRIED

Mayor Billis stated council did not have an easy decision to make. He further stated this was not the type of decision he likes to make either. He thanked both applicants for stepping forward. He also stated he hopes both applicants were not offended. Councilperson Ockerman informed Mr. Lawson if a motion would have been made for him, he would have voted yes for him too. Mr. Lawson wished everyone the best. Councilperson Bayless advised the city still needs someone to run the little league program. Mr. Lawson advised that position was something that a college kid could do for a summer job.

CALL TO AUDIENCE: Keith Johnson, 211 Hastings Street, stated he has known Councilperson Hornus for many years, and he is a watchdog. Mr. Johnson further stated he sleeps better at night knowing Councilperson Hornus is there. He also stated arguing is what government is about and he appreciates that. Mr. Johnson advised he feels the same way about Mr. Sawyer. Mr. Sawyer knows the community and the people and that says a lot about him.

Bill Lawson stated he was disappointed that he was not selected the first time, but when Mr. Sawyer asked him questions, Mr. Sawyer listened carefully to the answers there were given. Mr. Lawson further stated Mr. Sawyer was someone who would be good for the city.

ADJOURN: Hornus moved to adjourn.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Ockerman, Dumond, Hornus, Runyan, Bayless, Mehig.

No: None.

Motion CARRIED Time was 8:47 p.m.

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DR. JAMES BILLIS, MAYOR

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YVONNE F. LONG, CITY CLERK